

ZYGOTE

Zygote has a ringing in his ears. This could be attributed to the Arctic Monkeys, Electromagnetic Personnel Interdiction Control, or the sound of civilisation as we know it collapsing

COQUE UP

After that unfortunate misunderstanding over the legality of the Iraq war, it's so good to know that America has stretched out an electronic hand of friendship and forgiven la belle France. With French fries back on the menu and Champagne bubbling in American goblets, the reconciliation process has been cemented by none other than Microsoft.

In a global press release, Microsoft confirmed that its Office 2007 installation process removes older dictionary files and provides users of Outlook Express with a spellchecker only in French. It doesn't matter if English is your native tongue, or if you are Arabic; everything on offer is for Francophiles. For those combatants who refuse to engage in *parlez*, Microsoft invites users to visit its community forum and use third-party spellcheckers.

How gratifying to see that the biggest computer company on the planet is encouraging humanity to replace a load of murder with a load of *merde*.

CHEEKY MONKEYS

Zygote continues to be delighted by the way that record companies are being bypassed by the direct distribution of music online. The days are well and truly numbered for those big-label leeches of the music industry that have kept it in an ossified stranglehold for more

than half a century. And now the same thing is happening to the scumbag parasites who control ticket sales for live events.

Ticket agencies can exist only by ripping off the concert-goer. They buy up block-bookings and hold them to ransom. They charge ludicrous booking fees. And then they have the audacity to add a surcharge for paying online with a credit card. Sometimes they disappear altogether, as in the case of ticketout.com and getmetickets.net, owing millions of pounds to ticketless customers.

But bands and promoters are wising up to the fact that they can cut out these tapeworms. Arctic Monkeys announced that they would sell tickets for their current tour only from their own website and issued each member of their loyal mailing list a unique PIN, which could be used only once to buy a ticket to one of their shows.

Zygote relishes the day when all artistes will not only profit directly from their recorded music but also control the gate of their live appearances, too. Monkey see, monkey do, the sooner the better.

SHOCK AND AWE

On 20th September 1786, after tea and compulsory prayers, Luigi Galvani applied an electrical current to a frog's exposed thigh, which made it give an involuntary twitch. Ever since this momentous experiment proved that the

nervous system of a living creature is stimulated by electromagnetic waves, scientists have been dreaming of using electrical pulses to kill people.

They had to wait until 6th August 1890 before the electric chair was perfected, on which day Mr William Kemmler got judiciously roasted to death in a little less than four minutes. But the military soon discovered invading armies simply refused all invitations to form an orderly queue for electrocution, and the project was iced. They had to wait until 2004 for the development of microwave cannons that can transform the opposition into crispy duck, but there were a few human rights problems with that. Then one of them had the bright idea of using modern technology to create weapons for controlling gangs of the real enemy: children.

Electromagnetic Personnel Interdiction Control (EPIC) uses radio-frequency emissions to disrupt the balance and coordination functions of the targets' inner ears, to replicate extreme motion sickness. In other words, the forces of law and order can now combat civil unrest with vomit guns. An alternative version is already in use by certain local councils, the police, shop owners and some private individuals in the UK, who have bought 2,500 Mosquito devices between them. Manufactured by Compound

Security of Merthyr Tydfil and costing £495, the Mosquito 'youth deterrent' emits a nauseating high-frequency whine intolerable only to people younger than 25 years old.

Zygote wonders what all the fuss is about. You get exactly the same crowd-dispersal effect by exposing teenagers to Cilla Black.

SO LONG, SUCKERS

On the basis that the world is full of suckers, manufacturers no longer obscure the uselessness of their products. They flaunt them. One of Zygote's favourites is for bottled water imported by Aqua Distribution Inc. It has "never been in contact with man-made pollutants and is over two thousand years old. Best before November 2007." Then there are all those products you've already got but are too daft to realise, so you buy them again. These include digital photo frames, smartphones, digital radios, DVD recorders, satellite tuners, MP3 players and automatic TV recorders.

Stop, stop, STOP! All these devices are a waste of money. The necessary hardware is sitting right there on your desk, and if the software isn't already installed to exploit all the above functions, it is freely available. Soon, all computers will come equipped with a digital TV tuner, which will create a bit of a poser for the TV licence-dodger vans. But if you can't wait to watch another zillion channels of piffle and listen to another squillion channels of waffle, please don't spend more than £23 on a plug-in Freeview USB tuner. This turns your desktop or notebook into an instant digital TV/radio with as many advanced features as anything on the market.

Anyway, enough of this. Zygote must stop now. It's 4pm local time on WCBSTV. Time to minimise the word-processor window and catch up on *Judge Judy*. ☐

Great Moments in Computing © 1988-2007 Mel Croucher and Robin Grenville-Evans 233: CULT CHARACTERS



Exactly 25 years ago, the first computer cult was marketed by the creators of this cartoon strip.



'The Piman' was endowed with large, pink, swollen protruberances. He became a cult, then a star.



Evidently, nothing much has changed over the past quarter of a century.